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## Education in American prisons : a review of the literature

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Education in American Prisons:  
A Review of the Literature

Ryan McNamara

LS 400

California State University Monterey Bay

Dr. Linda Bynoe

May 20, 2010

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### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Linda Bynoe for revising my paper and guiding me through the steps I needed to take to complete this study. Additionally, I would like to thank CSUMB for providing the resources to make this research possible.

### LIBERAL STUDIES SENIOR CAPSTONE PAPER PROPOSAL

Name: Ryan McNamara

Date: March 1, 2010

Capstone Project Advisor: Dr. Linda Bynoe

Proposed Title of Capstone Project: Education in Prison

Rationale and Background: The reason I want to research education in prison is that it is the career path which I plan on pursuing. I believe it would be beneficial to have a detailed understanding of whether or not educational programs actually make a difference in the future of prison inmates lives. Additionally, I have had multiple jobs in companies that are owned by individuals who have spent significant time in prison. One of these bosses would hire associates after they got out of prison. To me, it was obvious they wanted to work and were trying (for the most part), but nobody seemed to have the skills required to keep a job. After they were fired it almost seemed inevitable that I would hear about them going back to prison. I think it would be a beneficial experience to research how to help prisoners attain and keep the skills necessary to attain and keep a job upon release.

MLO's:

3: Cross-cultural Competence: I plan on researching prisons which are very multi-cultural institutions. I plan on seeing if individuals of different backgrounds are affected differently by education in prison. Also, I intend a seeing if there is an inequity among certain ethnic groups with regard to education in prison.

7: Histories and Social Sciences: My capstone will analyze certain institutions (prisons) and people inside of them. Additionally it will include a historical analysis of prison education.

11: Ethical Reflection and Social Responsibility: The intention of my project is to learn how to be socially responsible and treat prisoners and ethically as possible. I want to find out how to utilize prison education to benefit prisoners and society.

1) Primary Question: How can educational programs in prison benefit both prisoners and society?

Secondary Questions:

- 1) How are ethnic groups affected differently with regards to prison education?
- 2) What are the most effective forms of pedagogy for prison?
- 3) What can be done to make programs more effective?
- 4) What do prisoners gain from participating in education programs?
- 5) What does society gain from having educational programs in prison?

2) To answer this question I plan on researching on the internet and the library for the next three weeks. I will be using databases offered within the CSUMB network such as ERIC, Wilson, and JSTOR.

3) The final project that I will produce will be a study with an introduction, explanation of my methodology, historical analysis of education in prison, a section discussing theories regarding prison education, a literature review consisting of peer reviewed articles from the last five years, findings from the research, and my own conclusion.

4) When the project is finished the final product will be of interest to law-makers, parole officers, judges, prison administrators, prison educators, prisoners, educators in general, and taxpayers in general.

5) Sources I have already consulted:

Clayton, S. (2005). Jail Inmates Bake Their Way To Successful Reentry. *Corrections*

*Today*, 67(2), 78-130. Retrieved from Academic Search Elite database.

This article discusses a program where prisoners are educated how to cook along with how to get and keep a job. This is a different type of education than I was thinking but it does seem a very affective one getting very useful skills.

O'Neill, L., MacKenzie, D., & Bierie, D. (2007). Educational Opportunities Within

Correctional Institutions. *Prison Journal*, 87(3), 311-327. Retrieved from Academic

Search Elite database.

This article evaluates the differences between *education* programs offered at two Maryland State Correctional Facilities.

Schuller, T. (2010). Who will argue the case for learners in prison?. *Times Educational*

*Supplement*, (4873), 6. Retrieved from Academic Search Elite database.

This article discusses education in prison in Great Britain. According to the article, before going to prison, the prisoners have to go through a diagnostic assessment in order to identify their academic failure. This seems to be a really interesting idea—to almost identify the reason people have had trouble with legitimate jobs and attempting to rectify it.

Ryan McNamara

Dr. Linda Bynoe

LS 400

March 17 2009

### Reflection

When I first went to college I was excited for a culture of intellectual debate, higher learning, and cultural diversity. I attended Linfield College; a prestigious university in McMinnville Oregon. When I arrived I found a University unconcerned with its student's well being as well as its student's education. I was harassed by the students, ignored by the teachers, and laughed at by the administration. I lost faith in college, but thankfully, I was coerced into attending the City College of San Francisco by my parents. Here, I saw a culturally diverse community of educated individuals. Although City College of San Francisco allowed me to regain faith in higher education my heart was still not in it. My grades were poor because of a lack of effort. I decided if I wasn't going to try in college it would be a better idea to gain a trade. I worked at a winery and then a machine shop for the next year and did hard manual labor. Upon realizing that while I could do these jobs for a while, I didn't want to do them all my life, I began to take classes at Cabrillo College at night. Once again, I found an institution that fostered healthy intellectual debate and student learning by having a culture that is free and open to different ideas and cultural backgrounds.

My experiences in junior college led me to question my secondary education. In high school I received great grades, demonstrated leadership by being class president and captain of both the track and cross country teams, as well as being the editor and chief of the literary arts



magazine. I was the perfect candidate for college, yet I was not prepared at all. The academics came easily to me but everything else was foreign. However, after working for a year and taking care of everything that one needs to take care of to live comfortably in society as well as a reassessing why I would go to college, I was ready.

Since fourth grade I had been told over and over again that the reason I was going to school was to prepare for college. Additionally, I was given the message that if I didn't go straight to a four year university I was a failure. This was when I realized that although I may have learned as a side effect of my drive for grades, learning was never my focus. I had never cared about actually learning anything during school. I had cared about grades to get me to the prestigious University where I figured I'd do my real learning.

What saved me from this was when I remembered being eleven years old at home sick with cancer. My teacher from school came over and instead of giving me the regular school work she gave me the sixth chapter of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. In it, his slave master's wife is teaching him how to read. The slave master finds out and proclaims something like teaching him is worse than giving him a weapon. Upon hearing this Douglas does anything he can to learn to read and educate himself. My teacher knew that I identified as a little jock and definitely not an intellectual and for the next couple of years I would have no physical prowess. The point my teacher was making to me was regardless of how much my sickness was going to limit my body it would never limit my mind. I was inspired by the idea that there was somebody in a far worse situation than I was at the same age who didn't have access to education, who still fought to have the opportunity to learn regardless of the difficulties and risks associated. I felt lucky to have all the books in my parent's library and was

encouraged to read them. For the first time in my life, I appreciated my education and really wanted to learn. Although some time before high school I forgot why I was going to school, I now remembered and wanted to be the person that reminds students that they are in it to learn. I wanted to find a pathway to be a person that can talk to students and include them in their own education by understanding the power of learning, knowledge, and pedagogy.

Upon researching the Liberal Studies program at CSUMB I knew I had found the pathway that I needed. Also, the actual college seemed to be the environment that I wanted to be part of. In the CSUMB vision statement it says:

Our vision of the goals of California State University, Monterey Bay includes: a model pluralistic academic community where all learn and teach one another in an atmosphere of mutual respect and pursuit of excellence; a faculty and staff motivated to excel in their respective fields as well as to contribute to the broadly defined university environment.

This statement expresses everything that I had dreamed about when I first made the long drive from Santa Cruz, California to McMinnville, Oregon and was severely disappointed. This time I would be satisfied. My first semester at CSUMB I satisfied my MLO 3 by completing Culture and Cultural Diversity; the fact that this class was even a requirement showed me that CSUMB cares about the highest level of intellectual debate. Meaning, in order to get the best ideas one would get representatives from every corner of the earth and as many different cultural backgrounds as possible and have them work together. Different cultures think differently so if one blends all these different ideas together they are going to have the highest number of answers. Thus, learning about different cultures and different ways of thinking encouraged me to think differently and at higher level and will allow me to teach students to do the same.

I believe I have already had some experience teaching students to think at a higher level through MLO 11 Ethical Reflection and Social responsibility. In both my LS 298S and 398S classes I completed my service learning at Marina High School in their inclusion program. Essentially, they had students with severe learning disabilities who went to mainstream education classes for the majority of the day and were given one period as a studying period. The teacher whom I worked with had the responsibility to know all the materials from all the classes in which she had students and be able to help them. I was thrown right in there which was an incredibly wonderful experience. It was intimidating but forced me to throw away all assumptions and prejudices and simply help these children. I researched the individual problems these students had so I knew their limitations but I came to the realization that they were no different to teach than anyone else. In fact they were more rewarding because things were harder for them to grasp and once we did work together and came to understanding a problem, philosophy, or fact there was an elation of learning that is indescribable.

Through my experience at Marina High and MLO 14: Advanced inquiry to education I learned about different forms of educational institutions as well as different forms of pedagogy I began to rethink what I want to teach. At Marina High I realized that many of the students had the same problems that I had in high school with trying to get grades rather than learning and being part of their own educational experience. Their disabilities made passing classes a stressful process. Passing and learning were two different outcomes and they rarely had a voice to do anything about it.

I thought about it and the people with the least power with regards their own educations are prisoners. Through my emphasis, MLO 10, I took a class entitled Political Economy of the

United States. Here, I learned of the financial restriction on a lot of Americans that leads to educational dropout and a rising prison population. Once somebody is in prison their educational opportunities depend on what facility they are incarcerated in, whether there needs are even offered, and success in a poor learning environment. Through MLO 10 and 7, I learned that a large educational discrepancy between different groups has and will continue to cause large problems. To alleviate this problem I chose to research how prison education can not only benefit prisoners but society in general.

My other service learning experiences were at McKinnon elementary in Salinas, California. Through MLO 9 I took PE for Elementary School Children and I taught PE to a class of fifth graders. This was difficult at first because there were over thirty students for me to control by myself but valuable in the end because I learned to both gain control over the class and get the student's respect. The process of seeing students develop skills throughout a semester was beneficial because it shows why one teaches. It shows development and learning which demonstrates accomplishment by a teacher which is a good feeling.

Additional MLO's that were helpful include MLO 1 which introduced me to the expectations that CSUMB had for me as a liberal studies major and prepared me to satisfy my other MLO's. MLO 2 was beneficial because it introduced me to analyzing pedagogy. MLO 4 was beneficial because it gave me a better understanding of children's literature and required me to engage in service learning where I got experience in a lower income classroom at McKinnon Elementary. Finally, MLO 6 was good because it gave me a better understanding of linguistics.

MLO's that were not helpful for me were MLO 4: Advanced English Communication and MLO 8: Quantitative Literacy. The three classes I took for these MLO's were a waste of my

time. For MLO 4 I took HCOM 311. I'm not sure whether it was a class to teach children or CSUMB students to write. Meaning the standards on the papers were lower than when I was in eighth grade, yet I learned nothing about teaching. Similarly, both Elementary Math View A and B were supposed to teach Liberal Studies students to teach children math. However, I quickly found out that they were simply teaching math that everyone should have known by eighth grade and rarely demonstrating how to teach it. Sadly enough most students still struggled. These were the least satisfying classes at CSUMB because although they had goals to teach LS students to teach children writing and math, in actuality they just taught LS students the skills we should have had down in eighth grade.

Despite these classes my experience at CSUMB has been a rewarding, beneficial, and valuable. I believe that CSUMB has definitely lived up to its vision statement. I have been a part of a multi-culturally literate community of good people for the last three years. Through the work that I have been required to do, I believe that I am prepared to not only enter the world as a successful individual but as part of a successful community of CSUMB graduates.

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# Education in American Prisons: A Review of the Literature

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May 20, 2010

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand how education programs in prison can benefit both prisoners and society in an America with a perennially rising prison population comprised of less educated individuals and budget cuts on education programs within prisons. The study includes a history of prisons in the United States from the pre-revolution English colonies to the present day, a theoretical perspective emphasizing education's ability to rehabilitate as noted by Ubah (2003), and a current research section analyzing studies from 2005-2010. The findings indicate a correlation with participation in educational programs in prison with reduced recidivism rates, an improvement in the environment of the prisons themselves, and an increased likelihood of the children of prisoners becoming educated along with other positive outcomes. This study displays the importance of higher education in prison juxtaposed with a depiction of how hard it is to implement a college program within prison walls. Also, the impact that facility type in which the prisoner is incarcerated has on the success of education programs is noted. Finally, the study indicates that there is significant value when education programs select prisoners that are incarcerated long enough to finish an education program and are released within a reasonable period of time to use their new skills.

*Keywords:* Prison education, correctional education, correctional rehabilitation, prison rehabilitation.



## Introduction

Education is known as a great equalizer; this is idealized by the fact that the prison population is less educated than the general population. According to Jane Harlow's (2003) "Education and Correctional Populations", 41.3% of State and Federal prisoners lack a high school diploma as compared to the general population with only 18.4% lacking the same educational achievement (Harlow, 2003, p.1). This inequity is an obvious reason why the incarcerated need to be given the opportunity to bridge this gap while in prison. The way to do this is through educational programs within the walls of correctional facilities.

The reason it is important to answer these questions in California at this point in time is on Jan 7, 2010 California's Governor Schwarzenegger announced a plan to limit the spending on California State Prisons. More concretely, on January 16, 2010, Miles Mendenhall (2010) of *The Press Democrat* reported that California state prisons laid off over 700 teachers. Even worse, as reported by Garth Stapely (2010) of the *Modesto Bee*, two thirds of all inmate education programs, vocational programs, and drug rehabilitation programs have been cut. What this means is now, less than one percent of the budget that is spent on prisoners is spent on their rehabilitation (Harlow, 2010). With these institutional changes, incarceration has clearly shifted to a mere punishment rather than an attempt at rehabilitation. Furthermore, given America has the biggest prison population and subsequently the biggest prison bill in the developed world, it would only seem logical to do something to combat the situation. However, diverting funds away from any programs that could help inmates adjust to the general public upon release and not recidivate is a message that policy makers either, don't care about prisoners, or don't understand

the positive effects educational-rehabilitative programs have on this generation of prisoners along with future generations.

Assuming policy-makers don't understand the positive effects prison education programs have, it is essential to understand how these programs can benefit both prisoners and society. Additionally, in times of economic uncertainty, with limited educators and resources it is essential to find the most efficient and beneficial manner to educate prisoners in a way that would allow them to become productive citizens once they are released. Research is overwhelmingly strong that there is a correlation between participation in educational programs and reduced rates of recidivism. Given this certainty, in a period of economic uncertainty, it is essential to understand how and why effective programs work, as well as to illustrate the benefits of their existence.

This is why the primary questions to this essay is: how can education programs in prison benefit both prisoners and society? The secondary questions that will be answered are: how are different ethnic groups affected differently with regards to prison education? What are the most effective forms of pedagogy for prison? What can be done to make programs more effective? What do prisoners gain from participating in education programs? What does society gain from educational programs in prison?

### Methodology

To complete my literature review I completed keyword searches in various databases including Academic Search Elite, JSTOR, ERIC, Google Scholar, and Wilson. I primarily used the keyword prison education or corrections education. If using these search terms within the entire texts yielded too broad of a selection, I searched for these terms within the abstracts. Additionally, for the current research section, I was sure to narrow the selection to peer reviewed articles published within the last five years. To find information about what was happening locally with regards to prison education, I primarily used the Newswatch database where I found newspaper articles. Within the Newswatch database, I searched for articles published in 2010 with the keyword prison education within the first paragraph. Finally, I used the Google search engine to find the Bureau of Justice statistic's website which is where I got the majority of my quantitative data.

For the history portion of the study, I chiefly relied on a doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Southern Mississippi by Donald Arthur Cabana entitled, *The Development and Evolution of Adult Correctional Education in the American Penitentiary* (1996). This is a complete history of penal education from 1790-1990. I retrieved this through Google scholar using the keyword prison education. For my theory I focused on "A Grounded Look at the Debate Over Prison-Based Education: Optimistic Theory Versus Pessimistic Worldview" (2003) written by Charles B.A. Ubah and Robert L. Robinson, Jr and published in *Prison Journal*. This essay discusses various idealism theories that acknowledge the possibility of rehabilitation through education. I found this essay by checking the reference list in Lauren O'Neill, Doris

Layton MacKenzie, and David M. Brierie's (2007) "Educational Opportunities Within Correctional Institutions: Does Facility Type Matter?".

## **Literature Review**

### **History:**

From Hammurabi's Code in 1790 BCE human civilization has had documented laws and punishment. However using humane incarceration methods which focus on rehabilitation is a revolutionary change in the manner in which humans punish crime. Throughout civilization galley slaves and capital punishment have been much more prevalent than incarceration. This is, in part, the reason prison history, as a method of rehabilitation rather than humiliation or punitive actions, is a unique American story.

The first traces of the history of prison education in America can be linked to the Puritans. Arrivals to the new world, the Puritans were people who had been persecuted and jailed in England under inhumane conditions. As Calvinists they believed that "each man is a special object of god's care so he should be educated" (Cabana, 1996, p.22), and thus instituted the American ideal of compulsory education. The puritans had a belief that if one could not read and understand the bible they were less likely to be a good member of society.

Less than ten years after their arrival to the new world, the Massachusetts Bay Colony built their first prison in 1635. Additionally, their Plymouth counterparts were not far behind establishing a small stockade in 1636. Although prisons existed, their primary use was as a temporary holding area before trial which would result in either capital punishment or something less severe focused on humiliation and punishment rather than rehabilitation. The Puritans did have workhouses in which the focus was rehabilitation but they were for "paupers, vagrants, and

other community members without means to survive on their own.” (Cabana, 1996, p.58). The notion of prison being a means to punish rather than rehabilitate can be traced to their belief in predestination—that man’s course is set for him at birth and is either good or bad. This meant that Puritan’s fundamental belief is that man commits crimes because he or she is not moral. This belief is counteractive to incarceration as a method of rehabilitation.

The Quakers, however, believe in world contamination, which attributes immoral behaviors to a contaminated world rather than individual evil. This would attribute at least part of the reasoning for crimes being committed to the environment in which a human lives rather than because the human was embodied by evil. This philosophy seems to reflect a belief in the possibility of rehabilitation and made the Quakers more likely pioneers of prison education.

Similarly to the Puritans, the Quakers also believed in the importance of education and its importance regarding a relationship with god. The Quakers however, another group very familiar with England’s most wretched jails, believe in something called inner light which is very different from predestination. They believe that within every human is the inner light of god and goodness, regardless of the crime they have committed. In 1682, William Penn, founded the Pennsylvania colony and sought to have it envision the principles of the Quakers. The way he did this in regards to punishment for crime was by enacting the Great Law of 1682. This was revolutionary because it called for public funds to maintain prisons, limited capital punishment to pre-meditated murder and treason, and called for prisoners to be treated in a humane manner. This was the first legislation of its kind. Although it was repealed shortly after Penn’s death in 1710, it was the most liberal humane treatment for prisoners in the civilized world to its time and led the way for what was established 80 years later in Philadelphia.

In 1790, a new generation of Quakers including Dr. Benjamin Rush and Benjamin Franklin undertook an experiment called the Walnut Street Jail which embodied the philosophy of a humane treatment of criminals that consisted of hard work, proper classification, and education. For the first ten years of its existence Walnut Street was an overwhelming success and a model for what an innovative jail should be, and by 1798 established America's first formal prison education classes. However, it soon fell to the same problems that prison's face today; overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and unthinkable immoral behaviors. Nonetheless Walnut Street established the tradition of incarceration with hard work and education as an attempt to restore morality and productivity as a method of sentencing for breaking the law rather than mere punishment.

In addition to the Walnut Street Jail being the first to have educational classes it also, although unintentionally, established the first vocational training. The purpose of teaching otherwise unskilled inmates skills was to fix and maintain the prison. However, prisoners learning and developing new skills that could benefit them outside of prison was an unintended positive outcome. Despite all the revolutionary ideals of Walnut Street, overcrowding and a lack of funds ended its revolutionary practices and prisons hit a dark period from 1816 to around 1870. During this era, Rush and Franklin's ideals were all but forgotten.

The construction of New York's Auburn Prison in 1819 marked this period of ominous architecture, few education programs, and industrious attitudes. During this period, massive Auburn style prisons were built with a primary concern of making money off an inmate population. Education neither changed from, nor grew from its roots and often digressed. However during this period there were certain landmarks. In 1838 the first paid educator was hired by the Pennsylvania State Legislator to teach classes rather than a chaplain or volunteer as

had been the previous practice. Additionally, in 1844 the first prison library was formed. Despite these prison-education firsts, during this period prisons basically became factories with slave labor whose goals were to make money off its inmates rather than rehabilitate them.

The next period of corrections education history is marked by the Elmira Reformatory, a prison established in 1876, which was built and ran with the primary goal of educating and restoring its inmates. Led by Zebulon Brockway, Elmira looked more like a hospital or college rather than a prison and it had an emphasis on education. Its inmates were given an assessment based on education, work, and behavior which allowed them to spend less time incarcerated which was a pioneer example for a parole system which first became formalized in 1874 Massachusetts. This was the first time in American history where education was formally issued as a system in prison. Meaning, they had separate classes based on need rather than mere mass communication as was done previously. Elmira was modeled with the primary focus on education and was tremendous success which led to a brief acceptance of education as a tool; however, this era reached its decline by 1910.

Regardless of a brief decline in prisoner access to education, Elmira's rehabilitative practices helped lead the way for the modern era of corrections education. In 1930 the Federal Bureau of Prison's was created and its first director Sanford Bates established a lasting example of hiring qualified educators and establishing a standard for prison education. Starting with New York, states began to follow suit. This was fueled, in a large part, by Austin McCormick's *The Education of Adult Prisoners* (1931) (as cited in Cabana, 1996, p.217) which was the first empirical evidence that education had positive effects rehabilitating prisoners.

Despite these positive outcomes, changing attitudes began to arise in the seventies when Robert Martinson (1974) published *What Works? Questions and Answers About the Prison Reform*. This publication is famous for a “nothing works” attitude towards prisoner rehabilitation (Ward, 2009; Ubah & Robinson 2003). Additionally, over the last 20 years America’s growth rate of the prison system in the United States has caused something known as the Prison Industrial Complex. (Torre & Fine, 2005, p.571). This is exemplified by the fact that the growth rate of the prison population was about 1.8% during the years 2000 to 2010 which is a two-thirds less than that of nineties 6.5% (Sabol, West, & Cooper, 2009, p.1). Since the 1980’s state and federal budgets have shifted away from public education and towards the construction and care of prisons which has an adverse affect on the working class and people of color. (Torre et al., 2005, p.571).

Finally, an additional strike to education in prison occurred in 1994 when congress passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act which made prisoners the only American citizens who could not qualify for financial aid for college by eliminating the Pell Grant program which was established in 1972 (Torre et al., 2005; Ubah et al., 2003; Ward, 2008; McCarty, 2006).

Additionally, as recently as 2001 FAFSA began including the question “Have you ever been convicted of possessing or selling illegal drugs.” (as cited in Torre et al., 2005, p.585). This additional obstacle for ex-convicts to pursue higher education is another tremendous blow for prisoners who are trying to turn around their academic careers; despite these setbacks as recently as 2005 according to “Census of State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 2005”: 85% of State and Federal facilities had educational classes, GED 77%, literacy for grades 1-4 67%, literacy for grades 5-8 66%, vocational 62%, special education 37%, college course 35%, and ESL 35%



(James, 2005, p.5). It must be noted that before Pell grants were revoked through the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act that 82.6% of prisons offered college programs and a year later only 63% (Ubah et al., 2003, p. 124). Today it is even less than that at 35%.

Additionally, the prison population is bigger than ever, in 2008, according to “Prisoners in 2008”, 1,610,446 American citizens resided in state or federal prison, this does not count private jails, local jails, or probationers (Sabol et al., 2009, p.1). Prisons face the same problems of overpopulation that has plagued American penitentiaries since Walnut St. in 1790.

### Theory

Studies that correlate participation in education programs in prison with reduced recidivism include: Effectiveness of vocational education and employment programs for adult offenders: A methodology-based analysis of the literature (Bouffard, Mackenzie, & Hickman, 2000) (as cited in O'Neill, Mackenzie, & Biere, 2007, p.311), The effectiveness of adult basic education and life-skills programs in reducing recidivism: A review and assessment of the research include: moral development, for them to acquire job skills, and improve their perceptions of themselves and society (Cecil, Drapkin, Mackenzie, & Hickman, 2000) (as cited in O'Neill, Mackenzie, & Biere, 2007, p.311), A meta-analysis of corrections based education, vocation, and work programs for adult offenders (Wilson, Gallagher, & Mackenzie, 2000) (as cited in O'Neill, Mackenzie, & Biere, 2007, p.311), *Prison education research project final report* (Criminal Justice Center 1994) (as cited in Ward, 2009, p.194), and Vocational and academic indicators of parole success (Schumacher, Anderson, & Anderson, 1990) (as cited in Ward, 2009, p.194) to name a few.

Central to all theories advocating prison education is the correlation between access to education and reduced recidivism; education should be able to help the student form a bridge from a world of prisoners to the general population. (Ubah et al., 2003, p.116) These are all aspects of the rehabilitation which incarceration is idealistically going to bring prisoners during their period of imprisonment. The theories that operate under the assumption that education brings inmates skills that will help them live a legitimate, productive life in the outside world are referred to as optimism or idealism theories (Ubah et al., 2003, p. 116).

First, the moral development theory hypothesizes that individuals will rehabilitate by engaging in liberal arts classes. These classes should, as Ubah and Robinson note, “strengthen people’s conscience as they confront the moral dilemmas addressed in the study of liberal arts.” (Ubah et al., 2003, p.116). This theory contends that through liberal art classes offenders will be able to improve their role-taking opportunities which will eventually lead to the development of empathy. (Ubah et al., 2003, p.116). Overall, the theory is if, “we teach inmates to think in a rational, moralistic mode, it will follow that their behavior will adjust accordingly.” (Ubah et al., 2003, p.117).

Next, the social-psychological development theory hypothesizes that educating is potentially a, “transformative and liberating process” that allows the prisoner to feel better about themselves and society. (Ubah et al., 2003, p.117). The idea behind this theory is if the prisoner uses his or her time to better themselves rather than engage in less beneficial criminal behavior they will feel better about themselves. Additionally participation in education allows prisoners to overcome the difficulties and dehumanization that come with prison. (Ubah et al., 2003, p.118) Additionally, prisoners often feel as if they have had no opportunities and society owes them. Under this theory, taking education opportunities is likely to alleviate prisoner’s anger at society. (Ubah et al., 2003, p.118).

Finally, the opportunity theory suggests that individuals commit crimes because of a lack of legitimate means to attain economic opportunities. Under this theory education in prison plays a vital role allowing inmates to gain human capital. (Ubah et al., 1993, p.119) Education gives individuals the economic opportunities to get jobs upon release to the general population and not have to resort to crime.

The theory that is most often cited in opposition to idealism theories is Martinson's 1974 "nothing works" report which states that prison education has no positive effects. (Ubah et al., 1993; Ward, 2009). Although more flaws in the report will be pointed out in the current research portion of this study, a few must be made now. Martinson wrote "What Works? Questions and Answers About Prison Reform," in response to a survey taken by him, Lipton, and Wilks about prison-reform programs of adult male offenders between 1945 and 1967. Although he made the claim that nothing works, 48% of programs in the study showed positive effects. Ubah and Robinson comment that Martinson's report is, "a carnival-mirror conclusion in the sense that Martinson's conclusions did not show the complete picture of correctional rehabilitation efforts." (Ubah et al., 2003, p.121). In fact Martinson's conclusions were so flawed that he acknowledged his mistakes in 1979 (Ubah et al., 2003, p.121). Despite these flaws Martinson's report is still cited as the cardinal reason to eliminate prison education (Ward, 2009; Ubah et al., 2003).

Given that Martinson's flawed logic is primary theory against the individual change and rehabilitation that is hypothesized in the idealists theories it would be illogical to research under any non-idealist theory. Education makes a person think in more complex manners, feel better about themselves, and society, and have marketable skills. This is why education is, just as, if not more essential in prison than the free world.

### **Current Research**

Scholarly literature correlates participation in educational programs; both vocational and academic education to be correlated with reduced chances of recidivism (Ward, 2009; O'Neill et al., 2007). Martinson's flawed "nothing works" (1974) report is still amongst the most cited alternative theory to this correlation (Ward, 2009; Ubah et al, 2003). The use of this report by anti prison-education advocates is why its flaws must be further discussed. Ward points out that, "Since, Martinson's reports, there have been few studies that do not show a correlation between prison education and recidivism." (Ward, 2009, p.196). Ward illustrates three flaws in how the study is interpreted and how it was performed. First, some of Martinson's largest criticism of vocational training in prison was that it didn't teach prisoners the correct skills that would be marketable in the outside world. This is more of a critique of the vocational training programs being implemented than vocational education in general. (Ward, 2009, p.195). Second, Martinson's methodology was questionable. (Ward, 2009, p.196). Finally, Martinson examined programs that were poorly implemented. (Ward, 2009, p.196). This shows that the extreme minority of studies that do not show a correlation need to be examined and questioned and reiterates the plethora of research corresponding education and reduced recidivism.

Given that it is fairly clear that education programs reduce recidivism, the goal of most studies is to see how to use educational opportunities in the most effective manner. Barbara Wade (2007) writes in her study, "Studies of Correctional Education Programs":

Since a lack of education may lead to poverty and crime, prison education programs should be rehabilitative, and should enable inmates to secure employment upon release, thereby reducing poverty and giving them an opportunity to become contributing members of society. (Wade, 2007, p.27).

The purpose of prison education may be to reduce recidivism on the surface but, if managed affectively, prison education could help reconstruct the socioeconomic structure of America by allowing some of society's most disadvantaged people educational opportunities that could help bridge the wealth gap the plagues the country.

This is why other factors, besides recidivism, must be considered when evaluating prison education. As Shakoor Ward (2009) illustrates, in his study, "Career and Technical Education in United States Prison: What Have We Learned," having the primary goal of having prison education to be rehabilitation rather than educational achievement is a problem. The value of rehabilitation over educational achievement is why recidivism is usually the measure of success for educational programs. It must be acknowledged that recidivism rates are a valid measure of the success of educational programs, but using this single piece of data has two fundamental problems. First, to use recidivism as the only variable is unfair to the education system because research has shown that recidivism is best predicted on numerous factors included age of first arrest, age upon release, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc. (Ward, 2009, p.198). Thus, to measure programs purely on correlation to recidivism is unfair and ineffective. The second problem with recidivism being used to measure an educational programs success is the wide array of definitions that it has. Whether it is defined as re-arrest, re-incarceration, or various other definitions affects the significance of the tests. Wade notes that if a parolee gets re-incarcerated because he or she got laid off it would be unfair to claim that the education had failed them (Wade, 2007, p.30). In a No Child Left Behind educational culture where academic success needs to be measured with tests; other methods of assessment for prison education would be a valuable step to improving the system. This is why, as Wade suggests, programs must be evaluated through student learning gains in addition to just recidivism rates (Wade, 2007, p.30).

Regardless of how prison programs are evaluated they need to be run properly first. In order for educational programs to maximize the effectiveness prisons must select participants who can finish the program and use the skills. Discussing vocational education opportunities, Ward illustrates that programs are not effective if participants don't finish them. (Ward, 2009, p.197). Ward also notes that the programs are most effective if inmates are released soon after completion of programs. (Ward, 2009, p.197) This makes it clear that prisons should prioritize prisoners for enrollment in programs who are serving enough time to complete vocational training but are released soon afterwards. Vocational education programs generally have waiting lists, so prison officials should select participants based on these guidelines.

Additionally, all educational programs should be careful labeling their students. Incarceration is often linked with poverty which means the prisoner is likely to have never have attended a well-maintained and organized school. Studies have shown that students labeled at risk can succeed in a well organized classroom (Wade, 2007, p.29). This shows that certain individuals have scholastic potential and never achieve it because of their socioeconomic standing. Time spent in prison can and should be an opportunity for prisoners to bridge this gap by giving them educational opportunities that they wouldn't otherwise have received.

Another critical issue concerning prison education is the environment for both the student and educator. Prison programs can run into difficulties in a variety of manners including: eclectic student population, too few spaces, limited resources, and personal fear of students, and lockdowns stopping attendance. (O'Neill et al., 2007; McCarty, 2006). In addition for the educator, "Teaching in a prison poses a series of unique challenges. A lack of financial resources and structural and institutional policies create pedagogical dilemmas for instructors." (McCarty, 2006, p.87). Despite these challenges inside of the classroom, outside of the classroom there is

little question that educational programs in prisons have a positive effect on the environment of the actual facility as 93% of prison wardens strongly support educational programs. (Torre et al., 2006, p.586). This idea is supported by Saylor and Gaes (1987), *Post release employment project: The effects of work skills acquisition in prison on post release employment* which correlated participation in vocational education programs with fewer behavior problems within the prison along with fewer criminal behaviors outside of prison (as cited in Ward, 2009, p.194).

These facts regarding the implication of education programs on the prison environment warrant studies on how the prison environment effects the education program. This is why Lauren O'Neill, Doris Layton MacKenzie, and David M. Brierie (2007) published "Educational Opportunities Within Correctional Institutions: Does Facility Type Matter?", which evaluated the educational outcomes of two similar (low risk, short term prisoner) samples of inmates at two different types of prisons. One group resided at a traditional prison whereas the other went into a boot camp facility that incorporated a strict, military like regime (O'Neill, et al., 2007, p.317). The findings were statistically significant that prisoners in the boot camp environment achieved higher educational outcomes (O'Neill, et al., 2007, p.323). Perhaps this was because of the smaller facilities emphasis on education and therapeutic atmosphere. However, the fact that the inmates at the boot camp facility entered the educational program as soon as they began their incarceration as opposed to those at the traditional jail where prisoners started their education, on average, much later, was very significant (O'Neill, et al., 2007, p.324). This further exemplifies Ward's point that if a prisoner isn't able to finish the education program in which they participate, it is less likely to help them upon release into the general population.

Even if the boot camp facilities were more effective solely because of access to education rather than general environment, the findings of this report should still encourage policy makers



to put low risk, short-termed prisoners in small facilities emphasizing rehabilitation and education rather than punishment. O'Neill et al. is careful to note that the facility must emphasize therapy as well as discipline; additionally, if traditional facilities had more resources they would have better educational outcomes (O'Neill, et al., 2007, p.325). The matter is debatable whether it was the boot camp atmosphere or a dichotomy in resources. Regardless, this test proves that it would be fiscally responsible in the long run to put short-term, low risk inmates in smaller facilities with more resources as they would have greater access to an education and, as tests have proven, would lead to reduced recidivism.

It is clear that availability of educators and resources is a byproduct of the smaller facilities program and an incredibly central figure in prison education. This is curious because as O'Neill et al. assert, "Maryland analysts report \$24 Millions in saving per year because of the correctional education programs, twice as much, as the states investment (O'Neill, et al., 2007, p.324). The logic is simple: people in prison cost taxpayers money; education causes people who were already in prison to be less likely to go back; in the long term less people are in prison; taxpayers save money. Furthermore Torre et al. found that the cost of withholding college for 100 prisoners could cost the state \$300,000 for one additional year of imprisonment and \$900,000 for two. (Torre et al., 2005, p.588). This financial divide makes it less comprehensible that, since 1994, prisoners are the only American citizens who cannot receive funds to go college. (Torre et al., 2005, p.570).

This makes the lack of access to higher education in prison another pivotal issue.

By stretching Affirmative Action into our nation's jails and prisons, we ask readers to consider questions of higher education, justice, and humanity for *all* of our nation's citizens, including those who, by virtue of race, ethnicity, and class based discrimination,

and even crime, have been disproportionately exported to the margins of America's consciousness and conscience. (Torre et al., 2005, p.570).

If the idea behind affirmative action is to even the educational playing fields for those who have been systematically discriminated against, prisoners are some of the most viable candidates. However Heather Jane McCarty, in her essay, "Educating Felons: Reflections on Higher Education in Prison," describes the measures it took to establish the only college program in a California state prison (San Quentin) which is completely privately funded through a non-profit called the Prison University Project. Only through private donation and the fact that the Bay Area has a plethora of colleges and a number of professors willing to donate their personal time, was this program created (McCarty, 2006, p.89). The point is to establish good college programs it takes a tremendous amount of community's money, effort, and time. This seems odd because as, McCarty points out, prisoners who spend time in a college program have a 55% smaller chance of recidivating. (McCarty, 2006, p.88) This argues that if initiatives were in order to establish more college programs that relied on something besides community heroism it would generate the economy by both creating jobs for educators and significantly reducing the prison population.

In their study, "Bar None: Extending Affirmative Action to Higher Education in Prison," (2005) Maria Torre and Michelle Fine report a study on the effects of higher education in a maximum security women's prison in New York (Torre et al., 2005, p.575). In addition to participation in college reducing recidivism by almost four times (Torre et al., 2005, p. 579), Torre et al. found a variety of additional positive effects. "In college women begin to see how unjust racial, economic, and social structures have oppressed them and narrowed their paths." (Torre et al., 2005, p.582). This idea can be taken beyond just women to male prisoners of socioeconomic status that systematically creates challenges and helps bring them into a situation

like prison. This can be empowering and allow the prisoner to follow a new, more determined and prepared, path.

Another positive effect higher education had on prisoners within the study was that it established an initiative to mentor other prisoners and give back to the communities that they eventually return to. Torre et al. report that graduates of college in prison are disproportionately likely to develop and run programs in order to better the quality of life while in prison as well as volunteering in the community upon release. (Torre et al., 2005, p.583).

Another essential aspect of higher education is the effect it has on the children of prisoners. Children are more likely to succeed if their incarcerated mothers are educated than if they are not. Torre et al. point out that the best indicator of a child's success academically, is a mother's education. (Torre et al., 2005, p.586). Torre et al. highlight a quote from a graduate of the program:

My daughter is proud of me and it gives her incentive to want to go (to college). I remember when she asked me if she had to go to college if she didn't want to. My response was no, she didn't have to if she didn't want. Then I sent her my grades with a little note that said, 'Not bad for a 30-year old Mom, huh?' When I spoke with her after that she said if her mother could do it so could she. (Torre & Fine, 2005, p.586)

If the purpose of prison education is rehabilitation this means college takes it to a new level. First it allows the prisoner to be much more marketable after release and a more intelligent overall person; but for inmates with children it simultaneously has an effect on their children making them less likely to commit crimes and more likely to have a successful life.

Torre et al. also found that having college helped the prison environment. Although as Torre et al. note the prison guards were not okay with the college program within the prison as they primarily perceived the programs as a relatively inexpensive education these prisoners were

receiving as compared to that of their own children. Despite this, they were still unanimously positive about the impact college had on the behavior of inmates. (Torre et al., 2005, p.187). Finally, Torre et al. found that women who completed college were generally happier upon release due to a sense of accomplishment (Torre et al., 2005, p.582).

### **Findings**

This study makes it clear that educational programs in prison have a wide array of positive effects even beyond reducing recidivism. There is no valid research that contends that educating incarcerated individuals is not a positive thing. When programs are run in a well organized, well perceived manner, educational programs will benefit both the prisoner and society greatly. It creates more positive environments in prison, creates prisoners that are well prepared to reintegrate with society, and, in the long term, saves the taxpayers money by reducing recidivism rates.

This study proves the idealism theories advocating personal change. Thus, educational programs are serving purposes. First, the numbers alone, prove that the opportunity theory is valid. Prisoners are less educated than the general population and thus had less economic opportunity when they committed their crime. The fact that prisoners that complete education programs are less likely to recidivate suggests that these inmates had more economic tools and thus were able to make money in a legitimate manner and did not need to resort to crime.

The social psychological theory that states that through education prisoners become empowered and less likely to lash out at society is valid as well. In fact, this theory can be expanded, to include the free children of prisoners. Not only can prisoners understand the social inequities that have helped bring them to the unpleasant situation that they are in which is empowering but through education in prison their children are more likely to become educated and empowered at an early age which makes them likely to never become incarcerated.

Additionally, research proves the validity of the moral development theory. Although their cannot be quantitative proof that education leads to moral development the fact that prison

wardens are overwhelmingly for education programs demonstrates education leads to a better, less hostile environment which suggests that education participants are equipped with better moral judgment. Even prison guards who resented the college programs being offered to the prisoners, unanimously agreed that it helped behaviors of inmates.

Finally, research implying prison education is not worthwhile is outdated and flawed. The fact that Martinson's (1974) "nothing works" is still referenced as the prevailing theory opposing prison education is preposterous given that it is over thirty years old and Martinson himself acknowledged it was flawed.

These findings suggest that prison education can help prisoners and society in a variety of manners. Research has proven education is correlated with recidivism and every member of society including those who are incarcerated, are better off if prisoners are educated and given the tools to become productive members of a community. Research also suggests that prisoners in higher education are more likely to do things to benefit the community after their release. The question becomes does society want to release re-offenders from our prisons or productive, positive members of society?

## **Conclusion**

Throughout American history prisons are often plagued by overcrowding which leads to educational programs being cut and resources taken away. The reason this continues to happen is the lack of investment in penal education as well as lack of prisoner access to education programs. This seems to be a poor plan because there is clear correlation between education and less time in prison which means the programs combat overcrowding which is the reasoning that they are cut. The other reason programs are cut are financial, and less money would be spent on prison in the long-term if more money was put into education programs. As illustrated throughout the study, reduced recidivism pays in full for the educational programs that directly lead to a positive re-entrance into society for many prisoners.

With this being said, it is unrealistic to expect a rich flow of funds anytime soon so programs must be implemented and evaluated correctly. If there are limited openings in educational programs, let prisoners who are going to be incarcerated long enough to finish them into the programs first. Learning half a skill is pointless and discouraging. Additionally, learning a skill without using it is fruitless as well. This is why prisoners who are going to be released soon after completion of educational programs should be selected so they can use their new found skills. Next, in a long term sense, it is fiscally responsible to put short term, low risk prisoners in a smaller environment where they will have greater access to education. Finally, there is no question education and recidivism are correlated therefore educational programs should be evaluated based on learning outcomes rather than mere recidivism rates.

This is why I recommend future research to be done on how education for incarcerated parents affects their children's likelihood of living positive, productive lives. It is clear correlating recidivism with educational programs in prison is not enough to change the thinking of policy makers which is why other, more personal effects of prison education must be researched in order to facilitate a public discourse. Showing that education in prison can affect and prevent future generations from ever committing crimes and becoming incarcerated may incite enough public outcry to promote change. In a *tough on crime* culture it is more powerful to show changes in children that the general public still views as *innocent* rather than their *criminal* parents.

To conclude, education has a wide array of positive effects besides the reduction of recidivism. It allows prisoners the sense of identity and accomplishment in a place where these things are hard to find. Additionally, prison education has a measurable positive effect on today's prisoners and taxpayers but an immeasurable effect on future generations. The children of prisoners are more likely to become educated themselves and less likely to follow their parent's path to incarceration. This is a piece of data that would be difficult to measure quantitatively, but is sure to have a long lasting impact on society.



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